

## **A Whistle In the Forest**

Fear is an odd thing. It can twist something innocent and ordinary and if placed under the right circumstances, can make something truly terrifying. A classic example of this would be a rocking horse. It's really just a rocking horse but if you put it in a dark room, in a dark house and make it move on its own, it becomes demonic and frightening. This is because we are afraid of the unknown. It's not so much the rocking horse itself that is scary, as I said before, it's just a rocking horse, but we are scared of its unknown ability. I experienced this first hand one day when I was walking home from my friend's house. I was nine at the time.

It was a crisp winter evening and although it was only four in the afternoon, the sun had already begun leaving us on its constant journey throughout the sky. I had just departed from my good friend's house and was walking through a natural forest trail back to my house. It was getting chilly and my scarf was pulled up around my ears and so at first I didn't hear it. After a while, it became apparent though. There was a faint whistle resounding in the tall, dark trees. It sounded somewhat playful, like a children's playground chant. Naturally, being the curious young child that I was, I looked for what was making the sound. I searched in bushes, in trees, even in an old, hollowed-out tree trunk. Eventually I was able to pinpoint it to a small hole in the ground by a river bed. The trickling water and the cheerful whistling created a small chorus of peace. I looked down the hole in the ground, being sure to not get my jeans muddy in the damp soil. It was too dark to see anything. The hole itself was only about the size of my tiny fists. I poked inside the cavity a bit to see if there was something living inside it. I could feel the squelch of moist mud and that was about it. The whistling kept on singing while I did this, I hadn't interrupted it at all. The sky was beginning to get a bit darker so I pushed myself off the ground and trotted home with the river and the whistling ringing out behind me.

I came back the next day and found the hole near the river again. The whistling was still singing the same tune as before. Still curious, I snatched a stick from the riverbed and poked inside the

cavity, a bit deeper this time. Still nothing yielded. I squatted next to the hole, listening to the joyful whistle. After a while, I decided to join in, after all I knew the tune by now. I mixed my voice with the unknown for a few seconds until it simply stopped and left me alone in the forest. I sat in silence, frozen with both confusion and fear. Why had it stopped? Was I in danger? What had just happened? A rustle emanated from a nearby bush and I leapt up to my feet and sprinted out of the forest. The air around me seemed to have a sense of decay on my tongue, as if the dead leaves' stench was forcing its way down my throat. Holding my breath, I burst from the gnarled trees and snatched a lungful of fresh air. After that startling incident I didn't return to the forest for weeks.

Eventually curiosity got the better of me. I had remained determined not to step foot into that surreal yet ghastly woodland, but as I only had the mind of an inquisitive young child; I eventually gave into my wonderment. Weeks later I pedalled to the edge of the forest trail on my bike. It was a calm afternoon and the sun hid behind a mass of clouds. For a while I simply stood there, telling myself it was foolish to go back into the swarm of intimidating trees. It must have looked odd to a bystander, seeing a small nine year old boy in a Thomas the Tank Engine shirt clutching his bicycle's handlebars while staring up at some woodland. I must have stood there for about ten minutes just gazing into the wilderness considering what my next step would be. Eventually, with shaking feet I stepped into the forest and strode along the path until I came to the hole by the riverbed. I sat on my haunches and peered into the void. All I could see was darkness. I grinned to myself, wondering how I could be so ridiculous as to think something supernatural was hiding in there. What a silly prospect. A childish notion. I hauled myself up on a nearby branch and began to walk away with one last glance to the hole. Sitting in the hole, glancing back at me, was an eye.

I started and fell to my knees, scrabbling towards the hole. The eye stared at me as I peered back at it. The eye was beautiful and had a stunning blue iris. It was mesmerising. We watched each other closely for minutes both caught in each other's gaze. The

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... And awoke in my own bed dripping with sweat. I jolted upright immediately and scanned the room nervously. I was safe. There was no more forest, no more river, no more hole and most importantly, no arm trying to drag me into the very depths of torturous hell that the black void had to offer. My mother raced in through the door upon hearing me awake and hugged me tightly, telling me that she had been so worried, that I was safe now and that the nightmares were over. I could only look at her in confusion. She read my face and understood that an explanation was in order. She told me that some backpackers walking the

nearby nature trail had heard me screaming and found me lying near the riverbed with my arm jammed deep into the hole, almost deeper than the hole physically allowed, and that I was unconscious but still screaming even while my body had shut down. They carried me from the forest and had brought me home after asking nearby neighbours whose child I was. I had been asleep for days, every now and then opening my eyes without seeing and I would scream. She didn't heed to my tale, passing it off as hysteria and the entire episode was blamed on a one-off seizure. Although that theory never explained the bruises on my wrist or the fact that I had heard the whistling weeks before I had my alleged 'seizure'. And most of all, it didn't elucidate that when the backpackers went back into the forest to further investigate, the hole in the ground had sealed up with rock, as if it had never been there in the first place.